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From the editor



“ So here we are in the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness and there is as much going on in the village as ever. From French lunches to controversial planning applications, Sonning Common has it all!

Read about how Nottakwire, the village's singing group, has enriched the lives of many residents (page 25) while, on a less positive note, vandalism at the primary school has destroyed young children's work (page 3).

The village is full of interesting characters with colourful histories to match and on page 11 we begin a series of articles on one resident's unconventional childhood.

It has been great to receive so many contributions this edition, particularly from new sources. So thank you for all your efforts.”

ROS VARNE Editor

Email me at:
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p.s...

Sonning Common Magazine is on sale at the village library in Grove Road. Annual subscriptions are also available. Contact distribution manager Geoffrey Adams. Email: geoffrey.adams5@btopenworld.com Phone: 0118 972 2134
For all advertising queries, please contact John Pearman from 18 October. Phone: 0118 972 2381 / 07794 291776. Email: pearman@dial.pipex.com
Maureen Dunn asks us to say that despite her advertisement for Family Hairdressing being omitted from the last edition she is very much in business and looking forward to seeing customers old and new.

WHILE EVERY EFFORT IS MADE TO ENSURE THE ACCURACY OF INFORMATION PRINTED IN THIS MAGAZINE, THE EDITOR AND THE PUBLISHER CANNOT ACCEPT ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONSEQUENCES OF ERRORS THAT OCCUR.

sonning common magazine

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COVER IMAGE – THE BEST IN BLOOM
Taken at Chiltern Edge Horticultural Society's Autumn Show - by Ros Varne

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Co-op re-fit to begin

The Somerfield store on Wood Lane is due to be closed temporarily from 15 to 25 November for extensive refurbishment and extension, before being re-opened as a Co-operative Food store.

A spokesperson for The Co-operative said: "Investment in the Sonning Common store will completely transform it, bringing a new era in food shopping to the local community. The refurbishment will include a 50 per cent extension of the sales area, new flooring, ceiling, additional tills and eco refrigeration."

"The store will no longer stock Somerfield-branded products, but will have an increased product range and a new in-store bakery." ■

A taste of France in Sonning Common

The wine flowed, conversation sparked and the food just kept on coming at a special French-themed charity lunch in the village hall.

The event on 3 September was organised by the Sonning Common Village Hall Management Committee. It raised £514 towards the village hall fund while a book sale on the day generated £80 for Oxfam.

Jill Vallis, Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury and all the members of the village hall management committee thanked all the guests and helpers at the French lunch.

"We could not have raised such an amazing figure without the generosity of Mr and Mrs Laithwaite, who donated the wine, donations of raffle prizes, including the first prize of a four-night stay in a French guest house, apples from Sue Frayling-Cork and Geoffrey Adams for the

Normandy apples flans, newly-ordered aprons for the helpers from Carl Wood, our marvellous local butcher, balloons from Jo Keys at Occasions and the Christian Community Action shop for sourcing bread baskets, vases, jugs and cutlery as well as the village lunch club for loaning us water jugs, tumblers and cutlery.

The helpers were almost all Sonning Common residents and heartfelt thanks go to John and Mary Price for organising a fantastic slide show, Peter Rickards for the sound system, Lisa Rees and Sara Capaldi for selling raffle tickets and to the stalwart kitchen helpers and servers: Sandra Cooper-Smith, Jo Hunt, Mary Cameron, Jean Stephenson, Sylvia Dickens, Joan Comber, Anne Symons, Ken Hopcroft, Elaine Williams, Margaret Moola, Susan Russman, Valerie Northfield, Colin Davies and Barrie Greenwood." ■

CHRISSE PHILLIPS-TILBURY
Sonning Common Village Hall Management Committee

LEFT:

The organisers of the French lunch in the village hall. From left, Geoff Ward, Jill Vallis, Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury, Mary Cameron, Joan Comber, Sylvia Dickens, Jean Stephenson, Peter Rickards, Jo Hunt and Barrie Greenwood.



Holiday fun at Chiltern Edge

A new holiday club at Chiltern Edge School during the summer attracted more than 80 youngsters.

Children, ranging in age from six to 16, tried their hands at film-making, multi-sport, forest fun, dance and drama, art and craft and creative cookery. The club cost from £20 per day.

Daniel Sadler, Chiltern Edge headteacher, said: "This is a really good example of the way that our local schools work together to benefit families in the village."

It is hoped to run a similar club during the Easter school holidays. For further information contact Brenda McNulty, Extended Schools Co-ordinator. Phone: 0118 972 1500 ext 449. Email: bmcnulty@chilternedge.oxon.sch.uk

TOP

■ Enjoying one of the craft activities available at The Holiday Club, Chiltern Edge School.

Police news

A Sonning Common man has been charged with indecent exposure and has been bailed to attend Oxford Magistrates Court in coming weeks.

Three men have been caught regarding a series of shed breaks in the Sonning Common area; no other offenders are being sought.

The next series of Have Your Say meetings, where residents can meet with members of the Henley Rural Neighbourhood Police Team, will take place at the One Stop, Wood Lane, on:

- 14 October, 7-8pm
- 21 October, 3-4pm
- 11 November 5-6pm
- 18 November 3-4pm

Vandals attack children's camp again

The community has rallied to help since a forest camp, designed and built by schoolchildren, was vandalised three times since Christmas.

The camp, at Sonning Common Primary School, was created by mainly four to seven-year-olds. It is used as an outdoor classroom where children follow the school curriculum while learning about the environment and developing outdoor skills.

In the latest and worst attack in July, a new £250 teepee was slashed before many of the children even had a chance to play in it. A pirate ship, which the children had fashioned themselves from wooden pallets, tyres and other recyclable materials, was burned to the ground.

The vandals urinated in boxes containing outdoor clothing and teddies belonging to the children. They also slashed open the soft toys and used the stuffing from them to start the fire.

The school believes the damage was done by older children who broke into the school through the paddock fence.

Forest Camp leader, Philippa Byrne, said she was "absolutely devastated" by the repeated attacks on the camp. "It is so demoralising for the children. They all work so very hard, in all

weathers, 12 months of the year to maintain it. Some of what has been destroyed, particularly the children's collections, are irreplaceable."

Many of the children were "visibly upset" when they saw the damage and faced the job of clearing it up, she said.

But out of something bad has come something good, according to Philippa. Primary school staff have taken home and repaired the damaged toys and donated new ones, while parents of reception children are planning to repair the teepee using patches from an old tent donated by a villager.

The Vines Farm Estate at Cane End has donated a special trolley with pneumatic tyres for ferrying materials between school and Forest Camp. This has been decorated with the Forest Camp logo by Henley Sign People, also at Cane End.

Other local people have donated outdoor clothing for the children and more are helping to build a new shelter as an outdoor classroom. The school's Parent Teacher Association is providing additional funding for the camp.

Said Philippa: "A lot of people have been shocked that this vandalism has happened here. Many of them have been stopping me in the street and asking if there is anything they can do to help. They have been really kind."

"It was a horrible thing to have happened but something really good has come out of it. Forest Camp will remain a permanent feature at Sonning Common Primary School despite the vandalism thanks to the positive attitude of its pupils, the generosity of the supporters and the vigilance of those reporting the incidents."

Villagers are asked to report sightings of trespass to the primary school on 0118 972 2105 or directly to the police on 0845 850 5505 or to phone 999 if they see a crime occurring. ■



ABOVE:

■ From left Lucy Jones, Michael Varnes, Archie Muncey, Katie Mulligan and Ben Maughan with the vandalised Forest Camp.

Pre-school vows to win back grant

At the time of writing this, our plans to build a brand new pre-school for Sonning Common are in a state of limbo.

As you may have read in local papers, we were greatly distressed to learn that the £450,000 grant we were awarded this year to build the new pre-school in Grove Road has been suspended, while central government reviews its budgets.

It may a temporary suspension, or a permanent withdrawal. We don't know yet.

But we do have some good news. Planning permission for the new building has been approved, so when our funding is eventually secured, construction can begin immediately.

We are still a long way away from raising the £12,000 we need to furnish and equip the new building but thanks to the support of local businesses, parents and other local people, we are now almost a quarter of the way towards our target.

We would particularly like to thank Davis Tate, Johnsson Matthey, Forresters hair salon, Hobbs of Henley, Beville estate agency, The Bird in Hand, The Unicorn, Sonning Common Garage, Palmer Stables, Tandoori

Connoisseur, Carl Wood the butcher, Mapledurham House and Beale Park. In tough economic times such as these, support for charities like ours often dwindles, so we really appreciate every contribution.

We will continue to fight hard to persuade the government not to withdraw our grant. But whatever the final decision, we would like to reassure people we will not give up on our plan to replace our current building, which, we believe, is now too small for the village and is beyond repair. ■

NIKKI HAMPTON
Sonning Common Pre-School fundraising committee

What a lot of lovely blooms

Early summer rain, followed by a warm June and July, brought out the best in Sonning Common's gardens this year.

The evidence of this was clear at the Chiltern Edge Horticultural Society's autumn show on 4 September at Chiltern Edge School.

Winner of the best exhibit in show for his vase of mixed dahlias was Keith Hedges, from Hazelmoor Lane, Gallowtree Common. Frank Williams received most points for flowers, vegetables and fruit. He also took the most prize money at the show while Peggy Hamblin won most points for floral art, David Brewer for roses and Peter Mason for vegetables.

Trio Val Mundy, Betty Peet and Ann Holt won the pot plant class while Martin Hedges was judged master gardener for three kinds of veg. Brothers Max and Harry Miller gained most points in the children's classes for their snowman and dinosaur-themed cakes.

Ronald and Vera Strong, of Green Lane, won the best front garden in Sonning



Common competition, as judged by the horticultural society.

Their colourful garden, brimming over with flowers, is testimony to their dedication as gardeners. The couple have lived in the village for 49 years. In 1971 they built their bungalow in the garden of their former home at the bottom of Green Lane, near the fish and chip shop.

Said Vera: "We have always loved gardening. It is a tremendous relaxation. When we're out there people stop and chat and you can pass the time of day with them."

Other winners of the best front garden competition were:

- 2nd – Bob and Sylvia Newham, Reades Lane**
- 3RD – Roger and Carol Parker, Woodlands Road**
- 4th – Mr and Mrs John Lamourne, Kennylands Road**
- 5TH – Pamela Franklin**
- 6th – Margaret Moola and Elaine Williams, Sedgefield Close**

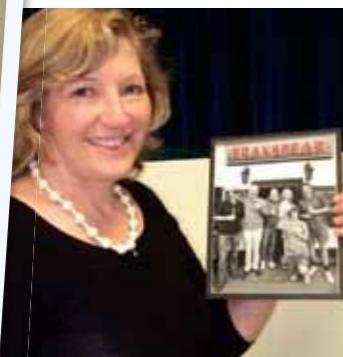


TOP ROW FROM L-R:

- This year's Chiltern Edge Horticultural Society winners were, from left, Val Mundy, Pete Mason, Jean Mason, Ann Holt, Betty Peet, Sara Batting, Maureen Stevens, Ronald and Vera Strong, Frank Williams, Keith Hedges, Martin Hedges. Front, from left, Harry and Max Miller.
- Ronald and Vera Strong, winners of the best front garden competition.
- From left Harry, six, Ed and Max Miller, seven, their prize-winning cakes.

BOTTOM ROW FROM L-R:

- Keith Hedges, who won best exhibit in show for his vase of mixed dahlias.
- Sara Batting, winner of the photography competition.



Local students are top dogs

Local secondary schools are celebrating record GCSE results for 2010.

Chiltern Edge School recently announced that 77 per cent of its students obtained five GCSE passes, with A* to C grades, while 67 per cent of pupils achieved five A* to C passes in English and mathematics.

A total of 82 per cent of Chiltern Edge students obtained a GCSE qualification in modern foreign languages.

The results confirm the specialist language college, which serves many families from Caversham and the north of Reading, as one of the highest achieving community schools in Oxfordshire.

Headteacher Daniel Sadler commented: "It was really significant for us that our results on the key measure of five A* to C passes for English and maths were better than all our local competitors.

"I am delighted for the students and staff who have worked so hard to achieve these fantastic results. I would also like to thank the parents who have

provided such excellent support over the last two years."

It was a similar success story at Gillotts School in Henley where 20 former Sonning Common Primary School children are currently on the register.

A total of 85 per cent of Gillotts students achieved the benchmark of five or more passes at grade C and above.

Headteacher Catharine Darnton said: "These results are the best that Gillotts has ever achieved and we are thrilled to see the continued improvement in standards.

"For the students, these results represent a great deal of individual success, which will stand them in good stead as they move forward with their education and future careers."

Chiltern Edge will be holding open mornings for Year 6 children and their parents on 5 and 6 October from 9.15 to 10.45am.

BELOW:

Chiltern Edge School students celebrate record exam successes.



Goodbye, farewell and hello

After many years of dedicated service, Sonning Common Primary School has said goodbye to teachers Val Harris, Linda Hanks and Fran Bodenham who retired in July. We wish them well and hope they have many happy years filled with sunny days.

We also say goodbye to Jo Price, Kirsty Gordon and Caroline Winton who have left for challenges in other schools. We wish them all the best in their new ventures.

All of the leavers filled the school with their enthusiasm for creating an environment where only the best was good enough and have left many many pupils with fond memories of their time at Sonning Common Primary School.

And so we say 'hello' to three new teachers: Tim Coates, Merryn Ough and Judith Walmsley as well as our new deputy headteacher Flora Barton. They have made an excellent start and are already contributing towards the success of Sonning Common Primary School.

CHRIS HIRST
Headteacher, Sonning Common Primary School





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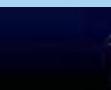
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That's one way to spend a childhood!



Not many people have enjoyed as unusual a childhood as village resident Helen James from Woodlands Road. At the age of 11 she left England with her nine-year-old sister, her 38-year-old mother and father, aged 36, to sail around the world - in a boat they built themselves.

The adventure, she says, made her everything she is today and she would do it again, given the chance, with her own family – husband Chris, son Charlie, five, and their new baby due soon.

Helen has many tales to tell and her family's story is truly inspirational. Here she tells us how it all began.

The story begins in 1972 ...

"My parents owned a repair garage and petrol station in Yapton, West Sussex. Dad was a mechanic and did the repairs, while Mum split her time between looking after the pumps and caring for my sister, then one, and I, aged three, in a baby den in the office.

Mum and Dad ran the business for eight years. Then one day, Dad came home and said to Mum, 'I'm in a rut and I want to get out. We need to see the children growing up. I think we should sell everything and sail around the world'. Mum said, 'Great'... so that's what we did.

We sold our house and cars to buy two small static caravans (one for sleeping in and the other for living in) and went to live on a tomato and lettuce farm for three years while Mum and Dad built the boat.

The boat started life as a simple fibreglass shell, so they embarked on the task of fitting everything to it – from the masts to the keel. And so our adventure began ...

They had no idea what they were doing at first, but with the help of some basic instruction diagrams and a lot of blood, sweat and tears, it started to come together.

As they were working on the boat itself, it occurred to them that they knew nothing about sailing (it's a family trait to dive in with both feet first, then learn how to swim!). So, they then set about learning the craft and enrolled on a Yachtmaster course.

Mum was very good at maths, which helped the navigation side of things, but Dad, at that time, couldn't read or write. As it later transpired, he was severely dyslexic, a fact we only discovered when I was tested for the same condition as a child. In the end he had to take all his Yachtmaster exams orally.

After three-and-a-half years of study, Mum and Dad both passed the theory course and so, after a couple of practical exercises sailing around the south coast, they decided we were ready to go.

On 5 May 1980, we left England bound for Le Havre with everything we owned on the boat which my sister and I had named Paddington.

She was a 34ft double-masted boat with a subdivided cabin where we cooked, lived and slept. Paddington bear's love of marmalade is well known, so when fate landed us with a set of orange sails for the boat, we knew we'd chosen the right name for it!

By now, I was 11 and my sister Justine was nine. While the preparation for the journey had been an adventure in itself, when the time came, neither of us wanted to go! – a feeling shared by my father as it turned out. But having endured years of sacrifice to make the dream come true, it was Mum who made sure we carried it through. And so our adventure began ...

Before we left, Mum and Dad bought us all the school books they thought we would need. Mum continued our education in a traditional sense, while Dad taught us all about the practical side of sailing and living on a boat - like how to run an engine, service a winch and put up a sail. It only occurred to us later on that he was probably learning while teaching us!!

We thought better than to go around the Bay of Biscay on our maiden voyage, as it's notoriously dangerous to sail, and opted instead for the canals of France. We took the masts down in Le Havre and travelled through the Canal de Seine to Paris and later on to the Canal de Bourgogne which, at that time, had 360 hand locks.

Needless to say, this involved a fair amount of physical labour, so my dad (no doubt to further our waterborne education!) got my sister and I to take turns to operate the hand locks. In the morning, one of us would ride our bike along the towpath and operate the locks, while the other would study. In the afternoon we swopped around. Our curriculum had quite a bit more PE in it than most I imagine.

We carried on through the French canal system to Lyon and on to Port St Louis near Marseille where we put up the masts again to sail around the south coast of France - Cannes, St Tropez, Antibes and Nice.

Our next stop was the Italian coast, eventually arriving in the port of Civitavecchia near Rome where we moored for a month to visit my mother's Italian relations in Marta in the region of Viterbo. Nine generations of them became our hosts in a village where no one spoke a word of English and my mum only had basic (and very rusty) Italian to communicate with. Still, the international language of wild hand gestures, talking loudly and vino tinto prevailed."

To be continued.....

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WE'LL BUILD FEWER houses...

BY ROS VARNES and CRAIG HENDERSON



New plans are being drawn up to reduce the number of houses being proposed for Lea Meadow.

The developer is aiming to reduce the number of houses in his outline planning application by about 15 per cent, it has been announced.

Agent Stuart Lilly, acting on behalf of the developer Richard Scott, said in mid-September that major modifications were being made to the plans as a result of ongoing negotiations with South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC).

Said Mr Lilly: "We are looking at a revised scheme of 80 to 86 units. We are in ongoing negotiations with the district council and there are significant modifications that are being considered as a result with regard to the lay-out and landscaping of the site."

He went on: "We have also maintained what we believe to be an open dialogue with the parish council and we hope to address a future meeting of the planning committee to discuss any further concerns.

"We are still determined to take this matter forward and we still truly believe in the merits of the development. We believe it will contribute significantly to the growth of Sonning Common."

He described the parish council's decision to recommend the planning application be refused as "predictable".

Michael Moore, from SODC's planning department, confirmed that he had written to the developer to outline his concerns over the proposed development.

These related to the fact that the proposed development was outside the village boundary and could have an adverse

impact on trees, hedgerows and the village infrastructure.

He said: "I think the current application, based on existing planning guidelines, is either going to be refused or withdrawn.

As of today, the development is contrary to the local development plan."

He added that the council was currently considering where to build new homes in the district over the next 15 years and concluded: "It is important that the district council has a calm, considered and transparent approach to the situation in Sonning Common." ■

ABOVE:

A Googlemap showing the site for proposed development at Lea Meadow.



Villagers voice fears over major plans for new houses

A large turn-out of villagers took part in a lively debate about controversial plans to build new houses on Lea Meadow.

Around 55 members of the public attended a special meeting of Sonning Common Parish Council's planning committee on 9 August to air their views on the outline planning application for the land south of the Herb Farm on Peppard Road.

Councillor Barrie Greenwood chaired the meeting and was joined by Jo Hunt (vice-chair), Chrissie Phillips-Tilbury, Jenny Poska and Douglas Kedge.

The parish council had received 10 representations from local residents prior to the meeting. Councillor Greenwood invited each to speak, and those that were present at the meeting did so, along with many other villagers.

The overwhelming, although not unanimous opinion of the public attendees, was that the proposed development – then for 105 houses – should be recommended for refusal for several reasons.

They took the view that the density and style of the proposed housing was not in keeping with the village; the village's water and sewage system was insufficient to cope with the increase; and there would be a significant increase in the amount of traffic on Peppard Road and subsequent impact on the village centre.

In addition, local amenities such as the primary schools and the health centre would find it difficult to meet the increased demand, they feared.

Following a lively public debate, the committee discussed the application. Councillor Douglas Kedge had researched the proposal in detail and gave an informed speech citing council planning rules for development which were apparently contravened by the Lea Meadow proposal. Other councillors also spoke and the matter was finally put to a vote.

Councillors voted by a majority of four votes to one to recommend to South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) that outline planning permission be refused.

To date SODC has received 130 representations from neighbours about the proposal. ■

The parish council's response

In a letter to South Oxfordshire District Council, the parish council's planning committee recommends that the Lea Meadow proposal be refused because:

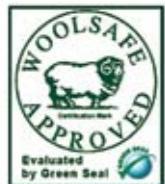
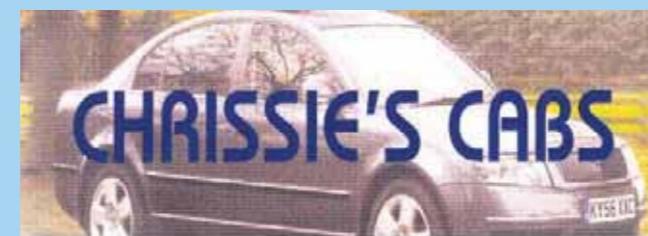
- Sonning Common is not a site specifically identified for housing development
 - the proposed development would extend the village's built-up area and encroach upon the surrounding countryside
 - the development is too big, too dense and out of keeping with its surroundings
 - current sewage provision could not cope
 - the removal of some hedgerows and trees would be detrimental to the site
 - existing residents may suffer from reduced water pressure
 - more cars would exacerbate current parking problems and congestion in Wood Lane and Grove Road
 - Sonning Common Primary School is already full and there is no spare classroom capacity
 - waiting times could increase at the health centre
- The planning committee also cites the recent findings of the Sonning Common Community Plan survey as grounds for refusal.
- "Following a very high return rate to the questionnaire (over 75 per cent) the replies indicated that 80 per cent of respondents did not want housing development, if it had to happen, on one large site. A number of small developments was preferred. The overwhelming view of residents on this matter is clear." ■

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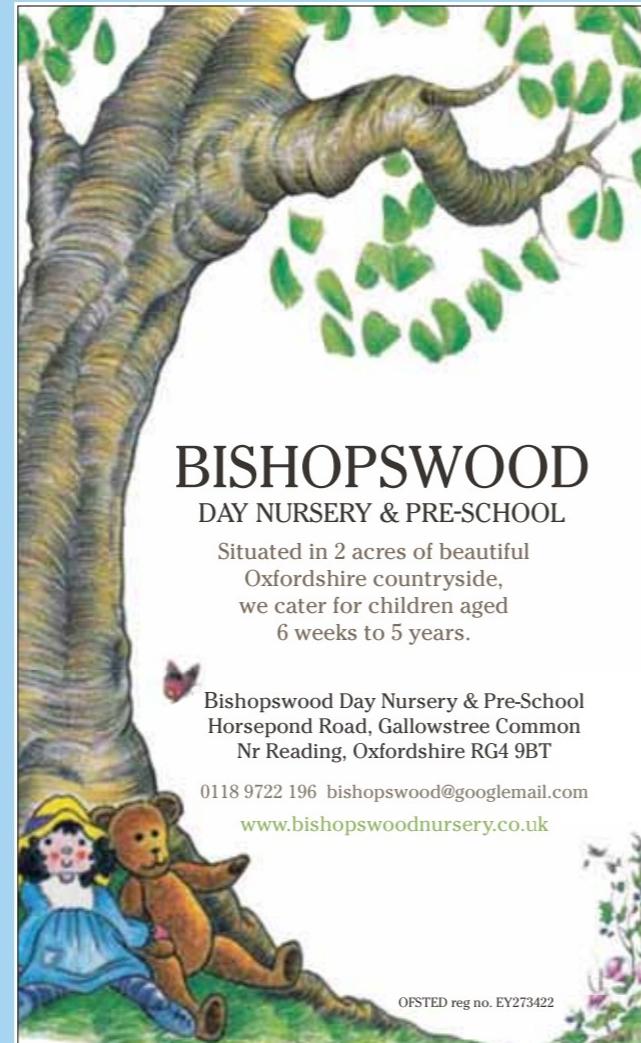
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FUNCTIONAL Physiotherapy

Since taking over the physiotherapy clinic at Sonning Common Health Centre a year ago, Jo Pereira's business has been steadily growing.

A second physiotherapist, Catherine Matthews, joined Functional Physiotherapy in August to help cope with the growing demand for treatments for back, neck and joint pain, sprains and strains, headaches, sports' injuries and pre and post-operative care.

As well as physiotherapy, the pair offer Pilates courses at the health centre, which are beneficial to everyone for correcting posture, lengthening and strengthening muscles, relieving pain and improving balance and coordination. Acupuncture for pain relief is also available.

Functional Physiotherapy prides itself on offering a flexible, friendly and patient-focussed service, designed to meet people's individual needs. Jo and Catherine aim to be always professional, prompt and efficient in their approach.

Practice owner Jo has 16 years' experience as a Chartered Physiotherapist. She has worked in Bristol, Oxfordshire, London and New Zealand and now enjoys being based in Sonning Common where, she says, she has received a warm and friendly welcome from the health centre and the wider community.

One of the chief benefits of being based at the health centre, says Jo, is the close working relationship that the physiotherapists have with the

doctors and staff so that patients can benefit from their combined skills and experience.

Jo became a physiotherapist because of her long-standing interest in human movement and function. One of the most rewarding aspects of her job, she says, is seeing people affected by a severe trauma, such as a road accident, being restored to health.

"Watching people regain their independence and learn to manage their pain more effectively so that they can return to work and function normally again is hugely satisfying."

Another area of importance for Functional Physiotherapy is pre and post-operative care. A patient scheduled for a hip replacement, for example, may find that physiotherapy helps to improve their muscle strength in preparation for surgery while post-operative exercises can increase their joint range and reduce recovery time afterwards.

For expectant Mums, Jo and Catherine offer a range of Pilates-based exercises designed to strengthen core and pelvic floor muscles and relieve pelvic and lower back pain. Similar exercises after the baby has been born can help Mums get back to normal sooner.

Jo and Catherine are happy to advise people by telephone as to whether physiotherapy may help them. The first Functional Physiotherapy session lasts up to 45 minutes with subsequent treatments normally taking 30 minutes.

The practice is registered with all major health insurance companies. All bookings are taken via the surgery.



ABOVE:
Catherine Matthews, left, and Jo Pereira of Functional Physiotherapy.



Functional Physio

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Well done!

Well deserved congratulations are due to the students and teachers at Chiltern Edge School for their best ever GCSE results, with 77 per cent of pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades.

The parents and community of Sonning Common and its surrounding villages must be very proud that our local school can achieve the sort of results that stand up extremely well against the national achievement levels.

The ongoing feeling that examinations are becoming easier belies the fact that all students work much harder than in years gone by with the demands of ongoing coursework and frequent national testing throughout their school career. It is hardly surprising that they have become better at examinations than students in the past; they must be the most examined generation yet!

Chiltern Edge is a specialist language college, a status they will have gained through showing an expertise in the teaching of languages. It means that there is extra funding available for the school which benefits all of the students and provides them with the opportunity to learn a foreign language until they are 16.

In an increasingly global environment, with so many of us travelling and working abroad, languages are an important asset for any young person.

In 2005 a Government decision allowed languages to become an option at 14 when previously it had been compulsory to study a language until 16.

The outcome has been that numbers of students with a language qualification has dwindled. It is therefore an outstanding achievement that our local comprehensive school has 82 per cent of its 16-year-olds gaining a GCSE grade C and above in a modern foreign language.

Wow, how impressive is that!! ■

DIANA PEARMAN
Kennylands Road

Stolen... an elderly lady's precious plants

Please be aware. We have someone in the locality stealing plants.

A wall trough planted in memory of my husband was stolen on 16/17 July from outside my home. It had a double trailing fuchsia in the middle, two verbenas and four begonias.

Eleven months ago, on 12 August 2009, I also had an expensive plant in an earthenware pot stolen. Both incidents have been reported to Thames Valley Police.

I live in a bungalow for the elderly.

I think it is disgusting that there is someone in or around the village who could steal plants that have been sown and planted to bring a little bit of colour into our lives.

Everyone said that I always put a good show in front of my bungalow but I will not be doing any more planting.

If anyone has any information about these thefts, please contact the police. ■

Name and address supplied

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ALAN GOSWELL
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Help the Village Gardeners to plant bulbs

The Village Gardeners have 3,000 bulbs to plant this autumn. Will you come and help us plant the bulbs on Sunday, 3 October?

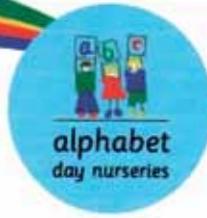
We are meeting at the health centre at 10am. Please come armed with a trowel or spade. Bring your children and your Granny.

This is a one-off request for help and does not mean that we expect you to turn out twice a month to help us.

If you can spare an hour that would be marvellous but 15 minutes would be appreciated. ■

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Tom Fort

BEASTS

Wildlife. You can't be against it, can you? And I'm as keen as anyone else on the shimmer of butterflies in the garden, the hum of questing bees, the snuffle of the hedgehog in the undergrowth, the chirrup and chatter of sparrows and finches. But there are limits.

Take pigeons. We have a fine cherry tree which, come May, is thick with swelling fruit. But we never get any because the pigeons come first. Aerial battalions of them descend

and tear the tree to bits, plastering the ground beneath with the digested waste of my cherries. My cherries. But the birds don't care. They just fly off, a few feathers drifting in the air, and wait until my back is turned.

I used to grow purple-sprouting broccoli. Not any more. I still haven't recovered from the sight of five pigeons collaborating to weigh down the netting until they were close enough the stick their horrible heads through the mesh and scoff my favourite veg.

Worst of all are the muntjac that infest the territory between Wood Lane and Grove Road.

I have put up three different fences to try and keep them out, but they still get in, Lord knows how. And once in! This summer we came back from holiday to find the hearts of all the lettuces gone, the courgette plants devastated, the leaves stripped from the climbing beans, the tops munched off the carrots, and little hoof marks everywhere.

I'm now considering further measures against these odious freeloaders. I'm ruling nothing out, including explosives. If you will excuse the expression, I will not be made a monkey of by a muntjac. ■

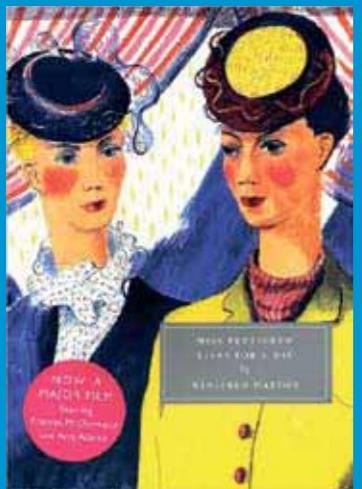


Writer and journalist Tom Fort, of Wood Lane, has lived in the village for 13 years. During his 10-year career as a full-time writer he has produced books on subjects including the Englishman's obsession with his lawn and the English person's habit of talking about the weather. He also writes book reviews for the Sunday Telegraph and Literary Review. In Tom's spare time, heaven is standing in a river fishing.

BOOK REVIEW

MISS PETTIGREW LIVES FOR A DAY

by Winifred Watson



MISS PETTIGREW is a middle-aged governess sent by her agency to work for a nightclub singer rather than a household full of unruly children. The book tells the story of 24 hours in her life that changed her forever.

This is definitely a woman's book and was an entertaining and light-hearted read with a happy ending and written with wit and a certain style.

The contrast between glamorous froth and the hard working and depressed spinster gave it a fairy tale appeal and I always wanted Miss Pettigrew to make the most of her experiences.

The characters were easy to engage with. I found them to be almost caricatures and rather superficial, particularly the men. But it did show the position of women in 1930's society as deeply dependent on men and the conventions of etiquette.

The references to make-up, negligees, furs and fashion will always appeal to women and I loved the original line drawings.

Some of the repartee is very funny and I thought Miss Pettigrew's ordeal by society was a good foil, showing the dubious morals and drug dependence of a very rich and largely bored section of society. It made some interesting social comments.

The universal appeal of a frumpy spinster emerging as a swan and having a dream fulfilled was appealing and I liked the spirit shown by Miss Pettigrew and her drink-fuelled ways of dealing with her situations.

The lack of genuine affection in her life was very sad and her fear of yet more children to govern was very humorous, but for me the book lacked real depth and the references to ethnic minorities made some of the language rather dated.

On the whole, though, it was fun and a change. I felt it would be comforting when I wanted some indulgence. ■

JOAN GRUMMANT

This review was contributed by a village book group which meets once a month to select a book to read and review.

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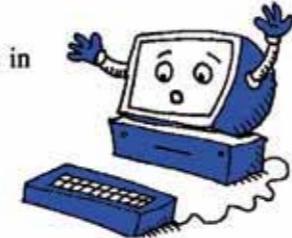
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TOP ROW FROM L-R:
Carole Lewis
Audrey Williamson
Maureen Downes
Anne Symons

BOTTOM ROW FROM L-R:
Kenneth Hopcroft
Cliff Pryke
Sheila Hayward

Nottakwire

THE VILLAGE SINGING GROUP

Carole Lewis

At the age of 11 I wanted to join the school choir and had to sing the National Anthem for the audition. I didn't get in. Although I love all types of music, I always knew that I 'couldn't sing'. That was before Nottakwire - it seems everybody can sing! I am an enthusiastic member and just love our Friday sessions. It is truly uplifting to be able to sing with this lovely group of people.

Audrey Williamson

Singing with Nottakwire has brought me back into the sunshine of life, helping me cope with my husband's long and distressing illness.

Maureen Downes

I was very sad after the death of my husband and thought that one thing that would help me through this difficult time would be to join a singing group. I thought that I was too old and out of practice for anyone to want me to sing with them. However, in a magical moment, amazingly, Nottakwire was starting up and you welcomed me in! Group members have been very friendly and welcoming and they have introduced me to a walking group in Sonning Common and to the University of the Third Age in Reading. Thank you for being there for me.

Anne Symons

Having always enjoyed music but also having been told all my life that I could not sing, I was a bit dubious about joining Nottakwire, but thought I would give it a go. I am so glad I took the plunge because, as well as (maybe) learning to hold a note a bit better, it is such fun and so enjoyable. A big plus is getting to know properly people I have seen in the village for years, but did not know.

Kenneth Hopcroft

Like a lost soul I wandered into the village hall one day feeling very low, having quite recently lost my wife. I was attracted by the sound of Margaret playing the piano. Margaret was saying how she would like to form a singing group. I put my name forward and that's how I became involved with Nottakwire. I've enjoyed the fun, social warmth and friendship.

Cliff Pryke

After many years of singing, I gave it a permanent rest. Then along comes Nottakwire to revive my enthusiasm again. What a super crowd to be with, and so much wonderful music to be had. Thank you Margaret and Elaine for your efforts.

Sheila Hayward

Nottakwire is absolutely brilliant. Morning lessons, male or female, all age groups, young or retired. I've met loads of new friends. Three cheers for Elaine and Margaret. They have (I think) taught me to sing.

Nottakwire is holding a special concert to celebrate its launch on Saturday 23 October at 3pm in the village hall.

Entry is free but by ticket only. Tickets are available from the FISH office in the village hall every weekday morning or from Margaret and Elaine on 0118 972 1248.

New members are welcome to join us from 5 November to swell our numbers in preparation for a Christmas event planned for Saturday 18 December at 3pm.

Margaret Moola and Elaine Williams – Nottakwire leaders

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How 'English' was Edward Elgar?

Elgar was at the forefront of an English musical renaissance at the end of the 19th century. An unquestionably major composer, whose musical invention and character were allied to a breadth of vision and insight not seen in an English composer since Purcell. Elgar was a man of contradictions and mysteries, as shown in perhaps his best-known work, the Enigma Variations.

As the conductor Sir Andrew Davis points out, the Enigma Variations came from nowhere; there was no precursor in English music, no hint of what was to come. A fantastic masterpiece representing a turning-point in English music, Enigma Variations is one of the miracles of musical history.

For most music lovers, Elgar was unquestionably English. As Davis said: 'When I think of English music, I think of Elgar'. For Davis, Elgar sums up our national psyche: our love of ceremony, a profound attachment to the English countryside, a wry

sense of humour and a pride in our national achievements.

So was Elgar the quintessential English composer? Well, up to a point. He was untouched by two of the major influences on that other great English composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams. The first of these was folk music, which was gradually becoming recognised as a valid form of music-making. Nor was Elgar the slightest bit interested in the glorious music of the composers of the 16th century English Renaissance: Tallis, Byrd, Taverner and so on.

Elgar drew much of his inspiration from European composers, especially Robert Schumann. Indeed, Elgar's music was championed by German conductors such as Hans Richter and by the composer Richard Strauss, who referred to Elgar as 'the first English progressivist'.

So how do we sum up this man who was English to the core, both in his music and in

his personality, but who was also part of the great European tradition of music making?

The Land of Hope and Glory was Elgar's public face but it hid an elusive and deeply complex personality. Elgar was deeply insecure and often suicidal. His music, often wistful and nostalgic, reflected the loneliness of the creative artist. Despite the honours heaped upon him, Elgar always felt himself an outsider, conscious of being in some way apart from those around him.

The local branch of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) will be presenting a study day on the life and times of Sir Edward Elgar on Saturday 6 November 2010. This day school will be given by the well-known local musician and lecturer Gwyn Parry-Jones and will cost £36. Further details are available from the WEA Reading, 27 Derby Road, Caversham, RG4 5HE. Phone: 0118 946 4137. Email: WEAreading@googlemail.com

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Oct

FRIDAY 1 Nottakwire section practices Village Hall 9am	FRIDAY 1 British Legion tea dance Village Hall 2 - 4pm	MONDAY 4 FISH – Garden centre visit 1.30pm	FRIDAY 8 Nottakwire – Full practice Village Hall 9.45am
WEDNESDAY 13 Chiltern Edge Horticultural Society – Growing and Showing Vegetables, Chiltern Edge School theatre 7.30pm	FRIDAY 15 Nottakwire section practices Village Hall 9am	MONDAY 18 Sonning Common Parish Council Village Hall 8pm	THURSDAY 21 FISH – Pub lunch 11.30am
THURSDAY 21 Sonning Common Women's Institute – Local Crime Community Sentencing Village Hall 7.30pm	FRIDAY 22 Nottakwire – Full practice & dress rehearsal Village Hall 10.15am & 2.30pm	SATURDAY 23 Nottakwire – Debut concert Free entry by ticket only Village Hall 2.45pm	FRIDAY 29 British Legion tea dance Village Hall 2 - 4pm
MONDAY 1 FISH – Garden centre visit 1.30pm	FRIDAY 5 Nottakwire – Full practice Village Hall 9.45am	WEDNESDAY 10 Chiltern Edge Horticultural Society – William Robinson, the Wild Gardener, by Richard Bisgrove, Chiltern Edge school theatre 7.30pm	THURSDAY 11 Sonning Common Society – You Must Remember This, by Julie Roberts, Sonning Common Library 7.30pm
SATURDAY 13 Feel Good Fair, by Sonning Common Health Centre Village Hall 10am - 4pm	MONDAY 15 Sonning Common Parish Council Village Hall 8pm	THURSDAY 18 FISH – Pub lunch 11.30am	THURSDAY 18 Sonning Common Women's Institute – A Woman of Wax - the Life of Madam Tussauds, by Tony Weston, Village Hall 7.30pm
FRIDAY 19 Nottakwire – Full practice Village Hall 9.45am	SATURDAY 20 Sonning Common Women's Institute Autumn Fair, Village hall 10am - 12.30pm	FRIDAY 26 British Legion tea dance Village Hall 2 - 4pm	

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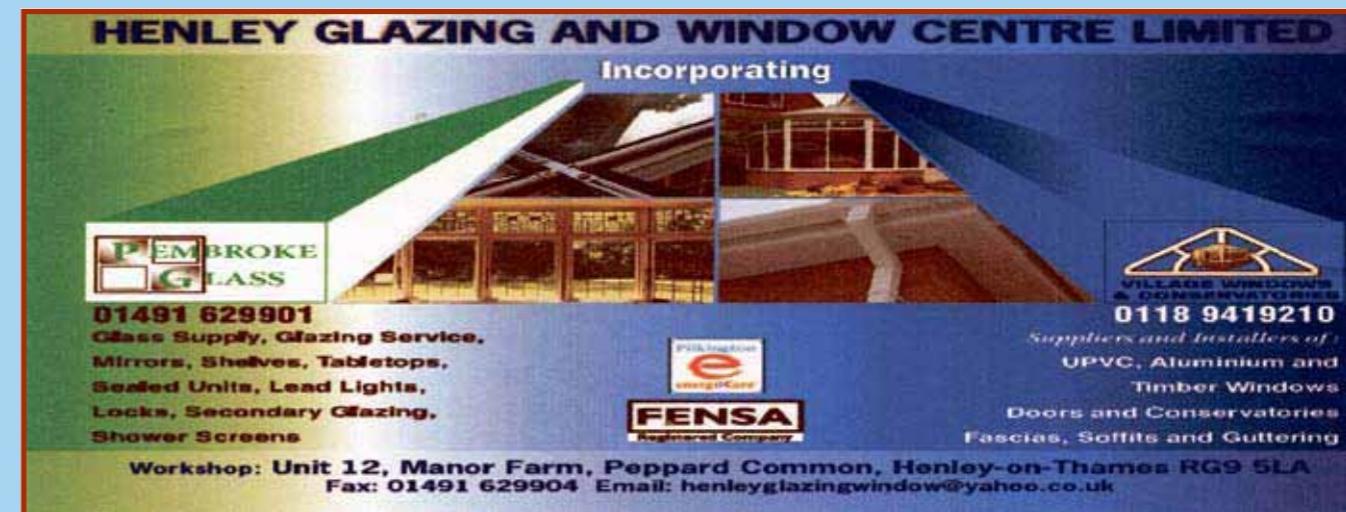
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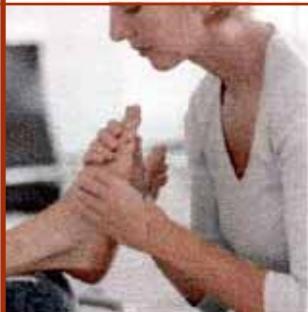
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